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ABSTRACT

The United States is now experiencing a new wave of immigrants, which is expected to increase as a result of the North American Free Trade Agreement. Schools, particularly those in five states, are facing great challenges in their efforts to meet the educational needs of immigrant students, most of whom speak different languages and are poor. When school systems are unprepared for this influx, teachers and administrators feel overwhelmed and become defeatist. In order to provide the best instruction for all students, school personnel must have adequate knowledge and resources and must be able to rid themselves of negative stereotypes and expectations. Successful immigrant student programs emphasize student orientation to school and society, bilingual instruction, specialized instructional techniques, low student/teacher ratio, a wide range of support services, comprehensive staff development, multicultural education, and supportive environments. This article presents a framework for equity and excellence outlining aspects of school effectiveness correlates: (1) instructional leadership; (2) instructional focus; (3) safe and orderly school climate; (4) high student expectations; (5) monitoring and measuring progress; and (6) parent and community support. (SV)

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A BLUEPRINT FOR AN EDUCATIONAL RESPONSE
TO THE NEEDS OF IMMIGRANT STUDENTS

by Abelardo Villarreal, Ph.D.

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A BLUEPRINT FOR AN EDUCATIONAL RESPONSE TO THE NEEDS OF IMMIGRANT STUDENTS

Abelardo Villarreal, Ph.D.

A profile of this nation's citizenry reveals a mosaic of cultures sharing unifying ideals--human dignity and a right to a live a fruitful and meaningful life. Immigrants not only formed this nation, they helped shape its democratic system and institutions. It should be expected, therefore, that this nation would feel proud of its open-door policy towards immigrants.

Two unprecedented waves of immigrants tested our conviction and commitment to maintaining this open-door tradition. The first one occurred at the turn of the century; the second one is occurring now. Furthermore, the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) will increase the number of immigrants coming to this country. Cortez et. al., (1993) state that "the annual growth of the Mexican immigrant population increases within the range of seven and one half to fourteen percent (7.5% to 14%) with the implementation of NAFTA." Just as this nation was able to overcome social institution adjustments caused by a wave of immigrants in the early 1900s, we must now find a way to uphold its "inclusivity" tradition and prevail over the challenges posed by this recent wave of immigrants that represents even more diverse cultural backgrounds.

The school is a social institution with the responsibility of meshing these cultural strengths and creating future generations that further our nation's democratic ideals and beliefs. This article provides insights about the implications for schools and how they can address the challenges posed by this recent wave of immigrants. Two overarching tenets guide its contents: (1) schools must be sensitive to immigrant students' unique social, cognitive and linguistic needs and develop plans to address them accordingly; and (2) schools must be given a chance to develop and exercise their own capabilities and inventiveness to address the needs of immigrant students.

Condition of Education for Recent Immigrant Students

According to the 1990 Census figures, five states (California, New York,

Texas, Florida and Illinois) have 73% of the total foreign-born youth under 18 years of age (McDonnell and Hill, 1993). These youth come from different cultures and experiences. Well over half of immigrant students speak different languages; the vast majority speak Spanish and are poor (Waggoner 1993).¹ The diversity of their backgrounds and school experiences makes schooling them a more complicated and challenging process. Schools are facing a concerned public that demands greater accountability and fiscal restraint. These conditions pose challenges that require schools to become more knowledgeable, sensitive, resourceful and proactive in meeting the needs of the immigrant student.

There's no question that many recent immigrant students face traumatic experiences when they first enter U.S. schools (Montemayor, 1988; McDonnell and Hill, 1993). A good number of immigrants come from war-torn countries, bringing scars that have a profound and lasting psychological impact on their lives. Some immigrant students have the good fortune of working with sensitive teachers and administrators that believe in them and help them to overcome these obstacles; others succumb to the pressures of an indifferent school and seek escape from the unfamiliar and the unknown by prematurely dropping out of our schools. Invariably, schools with limited success in meeting the needs of immigrant students have the following characteristics:

- Inadequate student preparation to cope with the new environment and to meaningfully participate in the regular program instruction.
- Limited opportunities for immigrant students to blend, socialize and learn from other students (isolation of immigrant students);
- Inappropriate training of school personnel on effective instructional techniques and materials for students with special needs;
- Lack of orientation programs that facilitate student adaptability to this society and to the requirements and approaches of this nation's educa-

tional system;

- Insensitivity of school personnel to the needs of immigrant students with different cultural and linguistic orientations; and
- Failure of schools to incorporate the challenge of educating these student populations in campus and district vision statements and educational planning.

McDonnell and Hill (1993) grapple with the limitations and problems of current research to provide schools with answers that are applicable across different immigrant communities. Schools must learn from their own or other schools' past successes, must use their own inventiveness, and must marshal the necessary resources to educate a significant portion of our student population or witness an upsurge in the number of student dropouts and functional illiterate in our communities.

Conjuring Visions of Success:

A Prerequisite

These immigrant students are a burden to our school. Let me tell you about this family that came from a little village in Mexico. Two of the five children had been to school, but had not learned to read. Mind you, the oldest is fourteen and the youngest is three. I placed the fourteen year old in the third grade, two in the second grade and one in the first grade. The teachers are raising hell. This is frustrating. For all I know, these kids will probably care less and leave school as soon as they can. The parents will not stay put; they'll leave and care less for their kids.

This is from a conversation with a principal who felt totally out of control and unable to address the situation. The principal and the teachers had little knowledge about how to best meet the needs of immigrant students, had assumed a defeatist attitude, and for all practical purposes had relinquished their responsibility of educating

¹ While the majority of recent immigrant students (67.7%) speak a language other than English, recent immigrants constitute just 23% of the U.S. population of non-English speakers (Waggoner 1993).

ing. A set of faulty thought patterns based on misinformation about immigrant students permeated the school culture and contributed to the dysfunctional responses to the educational needs of immigrant students.

Manz and Sims (1989) identify three elements that promote job effectiveness and performance. These include:

1. A Sense of Competence

Administrators and teachers must be equipped with strategies and techniques to address the needs of the immigrant students. Teachers need to feel that support and staff development are available to increase their competence. Furthermore, they must feel successful: success breeds more success.

2. A Sense of Purpose

The importance of educating immigrant students must be communicated to all staff as a high priority. School personnel must demonstrate a genuine desire to work with immigrant students and institute intense efforts to address their needs in an efficient and effective manner.

3. A Sense of Control

Opportunities for administrators and teachers to experience a sense of control will appear once teachers develop a sense of competence and purpose in meeting the needs of immigrant students. Once educators have the knowledge and the skills to address the needs of immigrant students, they must be given independence to exercise the instructional planning and teaching capabilities they possess.

The process of effective schooling has two major requirements. The first is the acquisition of adequate knowledge and resources to provide the best instruction to *all* students. Effective schools are equipped with the tools and resources to meet the challenge of educating immigrant students. These schools' personnel know about language assessment and placement procedures, bilingual and English as a Second Language program requirements, parent outreach and involvement practices, and a comprehensive educational program. Further, resources such as bilingual teachers, multicultural/bilingual materials and staff development activities are accessible.

The second requirement is a set of thought patterns that inspire confidence in

the educator to communicate high expectations to *all* students to learn and succeed. Even when school personnel have the training and the resources to implement a quality educational program, success is not likely to occur when school personnel hold negative expectations or myths about immigrant students (Robledo Montecel, 1993). Often, these negative expectations are based on dysfunctional or irrational beliefs and assumptions. They frequently become self-fulfilling prophecies with damaging results to immigrant students. Among some of the most damaging negative expectations that must be redressed by school personnel are the following:

- "Some immigrant groups are less capable than others to learn."
- "These immigrant groups will be here temporarily and will return to their homeland once they have become economically stable."
- "These immigrant groups are so far behind intellectually that the schools can do little to help them."
- "Some immigrant groups could care less about education."
- "Equity and excellence in education cannot occur simultaneously."

Creating a vision of success among school personnel is the responsibility of the administrator. He or she must possess the knowledge and ability to model thought processes that promote a school culture which bonds personnel and focuses on creating meaningful educational environments for immigrant students. As a team, school personnel must identify and challenge any dysfunctional patterns that become obstacles to the achievement of immigrant students. School personnel must re-examine and re-formulate high expectations that become self-fulfilling prophecies for immigrant students.

A Framework for Equity and Excellence

An effective educational plan for recent immigrants of public school age must reflect an awareness of the psychosocial, academic, linguistic and cultural needs of

immigrant students. Its approach must conform to the excellence and equity criteria associated with the six School Effectiveness Correlates presented on pages 5 and 15.

"Give a man a fish, and he will be fed for a day; teach a man to fish and he will be fed for a lifetime." The wisdom underlying a response to the educational needs of immigrant students is similar. We might paraphrase that in the following manner: "Give students the knowledge and they will feel competent; show them how to process knowledge and they will be in control of their own destinies." A quality educational program will develop the capability of each immigrant student to be a creator and consumer of knowledge.

Friedlander (1991) describes the key features of successful immigrant student programs. These key features include:

- Orientation to society and school as a critical component of the educational program;
- Specialized curriculum that emphasizes native language development and the rapid acquisition of the English language;
- Specialized instructional techniques such as sheltered English and cooperative learning used extensively in teaching content areas;
- Low student/teacher ratio that results in more individualized attention;
- A wide range of support services provided in an effort to more comprehensively address student needs outside the classroom that can affect student achievement;
- Comprehensive staff development programs that prepare teachers and other school personnel to better address the needs of recent immigrant students;
- High prioritization of multicultural education and the valuing/respecting of cultural and linguistic diversity in the campus;
- Equitable access to resources (bilingual teachers and counselors); and
- Supportive environments that shelter and support immigrant students helping them to cope with hostility and unfamiliarity.

The literature identifies six correlates which group successful strategies and practices into the following areas of school activity: instructional leadership, instructional

A Blueprint - continued on page 5

al focus, a safe and orderly school climate, high student expectations, monitoring and measuring progress, and parent and community support. The box at right provides a list of those indicators which the literature suggests are critical in an effective school for immigrant students. This list will serve two purposes: (1) to help school districts and campuses assess the degree to which they are appropriately responding to the educational needs of immigrant students; and (2) to help them plan quality educational programs for immigrant students.

Conclusion

Schools must rethink their fundamental assumptions about their responsibility and commitment to immigrant students. Schools have a legal and moral obligation to educate immigrant students (Cárdenas, 1978). Schools must accommodate special educational needs of immigrant students. If immigrant students are denied the opportunity to develop their intellectual potential, they - and we - are robbed of a most precious treasure.

Schools face the following key challenges when formulating equitable and effective educational responses to immigrant students' needs:

- Schools must use their own inventiveness to integrate new strategies into their instructional design.
- Schools must provide the opportunity for administrators and teachers to develop and exercise capabilities to design and implement educational programs.
- School personnel must conjure visions of success, since negative mental images can undermine even the most well-intentioned, theory-grounded educational plans.
- School personnel must initiate efforts to change dysfunctional mental images that interfere with the successful implementation of a plan.
- Educators must create a mental image of the immigrant student as a strategic and independent learner of English and academic concepts, translating this image into statements and programs that

showcase the school as a major vehicle through which immigrant students can acquire lifelong learning skills and processes.

The concepts outlined in this article should not be seen as a panacea; they are not. They should be seen as a carefully designed list of strategies rooted in what we at IDRA - as educators, researchers, and advocates - know works for immigrant students. The journey can be exciting, challenging and rewarding.

Resources

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